

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 06126 151236Z

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ACTION NEA-10

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R 131617Z SEP 76
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9548

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 6126

STADIS//////////

FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SY
SUBJECT: SYRIAN JEWS

REF: STATE 218547

1. AS REPORTED DAMASCUS 5619, RABBI HERSHBERG APPARENTLY HAD NO BASIS FOR HIS COMMENTS IN JERUSALEM ABOUT LIBERALIZATION OF SYRIAN EMIGRATION POLICIES FOR SYRIAN JEWS. HIS STATEMENTS MAY ONLY HAVE FUELLED GROUNDLESS HOPES ON THE PART OF THOSE WHO HAD BEEN WAITING MANY YEARS FOR FAMILY REUNIFICATION.

2. I AM INTRIGUED, HOWEVER, BY THE POSSIBILITY THAT HIAS MIGHT JUST HAVE AN ARGUMENT IN TEVMS OF ITS MANDATE WHICH THE SYRIANS COULD ACCEPT AS CONSTITUTING THE "GUARANTEES" TO WHICH ASAD HAS REFERRED IN THE PAST.

3. AS A FIRST STEP, I RECOMMEND THAT HIAS CONTACT SYRIAN AMBASSADOR KABBANI TO DISCUSS THEIR APPROACH. WHEN LAST IN WASHINGTON IN LATE JULY, I HEARD IN NEA/ARN THAT KABBANI ON HIS OWN INITIATIVE EITHER WAS PLANNING OR HAD ALREADY SUBMITTED A RECOMMENDATION TO DAMASCUS THAT, AS A HUMANITARIAN GESTURE, ELDERLY SYRIAN JEWS WHO WERE RELATIVES OF AMERICAN CITIZENS BE PERMITTED TO DEPART SYRIA TO SETTLE WITH THEIR FAMILIES IN THE U.S. I WAS UNABLE TO CONTACT

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KABBANI DURING MY OWN VISIT BUT IF HE DID CARRY THROUGH

WITH THIS IDEA (AND NO SYRIAN HAS SPOKEN TO ME ABOUT IT) IT COULD SERVE AS A POSSIBLY USEFUL PLATFORM FOR HIAS TO BUILD UPON. SUCH DISCUSSIONS COULD IN ANY EVENT HELP HIAS DETERMINE THE UTILITY OF ITS SENDING A DELEGATION TO DAMASCUS LATER THIS YEAR. I FEEL STRONGLY THAT ANY SUCH VISIT SHOULD BE CAREFULLY AND QUIETLY PREPARED IF THERE ARE TO BE POSITIVE RESULTS. FROM MY OWN PAST CONTACTS WITH HIAS REPS, I KNOW THEY WOULD SHARE THAT VIEW.

4. ACTION REQUESTED: ADVISE ABOUT STATUS OF KABBANI'S REPORTED INITIATIVE AND WHETHER DEPARTMENT WILL RECOMMEND HIAS CONTACT HIM. ANSWERS TO BOTH QUESTIONS WILL HELP ME DETERMINE BEST COURSE TO FOLLOW HERE.

MURPHY

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